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PAKISTAN KEEPING AFGHAN AID ROLE

U.S. to Continue Its Conduit With Islamabad for Arms Shipments to Rebels

By ELAINE SCIOLINO

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 25 — The United States will continue to use Pakistan's intelligence services as the conduit for military aid to the Afghan rebels instead of sending it directly to the newly formed rebel government-in-exile, senior Administration officials said today.

But these officials stressed that Washington would expand direct cooperation — through the Agency for International Development — with the Afghan guerrillas in such areas as food distribution, health, education and reconstruction programs.

Although military aid figures remain classified, in 1988 the United States and Saudi Arabia gave the rebels in excess of \$700 million in military and other aid, and can be expected to give about the same amount this year, according to some senior Administration officials and lawmakers.

Both United States and Pakistani officials argue that it is ill-advised to tamper with a military aid network that has worked well over the years. They add that it is too risky to turn over responsibility for aid dispersal to an embryonic rebel government that may be rejected by the Afghan people or prove incapable of governing.

Aid a Sore Point

The United States has said it will not recognize the government-in-exile until it has substantial control over Afghan territory, a functioning civil administration and broad popular support.

The distribution of American military aid has been a sore point between Washington and Islamabad over the years because Pakistan has tended to favor the most militant fundamentalist rebel leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, by giving him more aid at the expense of moderate groups. But in recent months, Pakistan has reduced Mr. Hekmatyar's share under American pressure, although he still receives about one-fourth of American military aid, more than any other group.

It is not clear how much influence Mr. Hekmatyar, known for his strongly anti-American views, will wield in the interim government. Although he was originally slated to control the potentially important Defense Ministry, he and his followers will now take responsibility for foreign affairs, justice and border ministries.

The Bush Administration does not seem concerned that Mr. Hekmatyar will emerge as a key leader, or that the resistance will establish a fundamentalist Islamic government antipathetic to the United States.



Decentralization Seen

"The likelihood that a fundamentalist regime seeking to destabilize other states will emerge is very remote," said one senior Administration official. "By far the most likely outcome is going to be a decentralized government where a good deal of power rests with tribal, ethnic and regional groups."

In the last three weeks, the Bush Administration has been grappling with how to gradually shift the United States role in Afghanistan as a provider of massive military aid to the rebels to a partner in reconstruction.

To that end, President Bush has signed a formal order pledging continued military and other financial support for the Afghan rebels until a government of "self-determination" replaces the current one, senior Administration officials said today.

The classified order, known as a National Security Directive, was signed Feb. 13, three days after Mr. Bush decided in principle at a National Security Council meeting to continue aiding the rebels despite the withdrawal of the last Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The order also directs various agencies to examine the feasibility and advisability of converting a large proportion of United States covert military aid into humanitarian aid.

As the policy review continues, some Administration officials and lawmakers are urging limitations on Pakistan's role.

"We ought to try to regain some level of control over our aid programs, particularly when we begin to convert some of our aid from military into humanitarian assistance," said Senator Gordon J. Humphrey, the New Hampshire Republican who has been one of the Senate's most vigorous proponents of military aid to the rebels.

In addition, Pakistan's role in funneling aid to the rebels on behalf of the United States over the years has come under increasing criticism at home, and Pakistani officials argue that the fragile Government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto cannot afford to give the United States control over aid.

Because Pakistan has been so cooperative, the United States continues to be reluctant to criticize its role.

Reluctant to Protest

Senior Administration officials acknowledge, for example, that Pakistani military advisers and technicians are helping the resistance inside Afghanistan in the operation and repair of equipment, but add that they are reluctant to protest.

"The United States would in effect be setting up a parallel government in Pakistan," said one Pakistani official. "We would be charged with becoming an instrument of U.S. policy."

Administration officials and lawmakers say that the rebels have more than adequate stockpiles of military aid, both from recent United States deliveries and vast amounts of weaponry captured from the Afghan Army and departing Soviet soldiers.

The Administration is examining the possibility of shifting in excess of \$100 million of its aid to Afghanistan's reconstruction effort, in addition to the \$150 million in American humanitarian aid that has already been appropriated in fiscal 1989.



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